

POINT KEEPS
BLUES CLEAR
AT THE TOP

WYCOMBE Wanderers picked up a useful point at Leatherhead on Saturday to keep themselves clear at the top of the Rothmans Isthmian League. And a point apiece was about right after a fine battle between two well matched teams.

Goalless draws often suggest drab encounters but this was far from the case at Fetcham Grove. Both sides attacked strongly and both had chances to score. Overall, I felt the Blues had the better scoring opportunities but they were unable to put them away.

Once again Wycombe owe their defence a big debt for earning a share of the spoils. Alan Phillips and Keith Mead were outstanding in the middle and Phillips in particular has made giant strides in recent matches. It was the same two years ago when Alan joined Wanderers

He got off to a slow start then, but soon established himself as a top defender.

Wanderers met with limited success in midfield where once again Gavin Fraser impressed. He had a particularly difficult man opposing him in the strong and powerful John Cooper but the young Wycombe player stuck to his guns and gave another gritty display. Unfortunately neither Howard Kennedy nor Mick Holifield were quite at their best to give Fraser the support he needed.

Upfront Ian Pearson looked the pick of the three while Howard Kettleborough again did well in the air, giving accomplished centre back Dave Reid several unhappy moments. But Dylan Evans looked totally out of sorts and was caught in possession all too regularly before being replaced by Tony Horseman.

Goalkeeper Peter Spittle

By STUART EARP: Leatherhead 0, Wycombe Wanderers 0

deserves a special mention. He came into the side at the last moment when John Maskell was struck down with a stomach bug and gave a highly competent performance. The Blues are fortunate to have such a player as their number two 'keeper.

Leatherhead, who disappointingly dropped left back Ray Eaton to substitute (Ray was Wycombe's full back last season), got off to a cracking start and Spittle did well to keep out an awkward Colin Woffinden drive after six minutes.

But Wanderers weathered the early pressure and began to exploit the weakness of Peter Page. The full back was forced to bring down Pearson often and Wycombe's best bet for a goal always looked likely to originate from the right hand side. A long range effort from Kennedy caused John Swannell some trouble but

the former England amateur 'keeper held the drive at the second attempt. Then in the 29th minute Fraser robbed Chris Kelly and ran 40 yards before setting up a chance for Pearson but he sliced his first time shot wide on the post.

Best chance of the half fell to Holifield in the 37th minute. He shrugged off two tackles as he sprinted into the penalty area but Swannell stuck out a boot to block his shot and the ball was cleared.

Wanderers again came in for heavy pressure at the start of the second half but by playing the ball carefully and accurately out of the defence they gave themselves time to recover. Despite the efforts of the back four to build attacks, however, the Blues were rarely able to create many clear scoring chances and had to rely on breakaways.

One fine move almost brought a goal when Holifield played a 1-2 with Pearson but the former pushed the ball just too far and Swannell was quick to intercept.

Horseman replaced the unhappy Evans after 74 minutes and almost snatched the all important breakthrough within two minutes. Woffinden dangerously tried to play himself out of trouble but was robbed by Pearson who took the ball along the Leatherhead bye-line. He crossed low and hard to beat Swannell but Horseman's shot was blocked by the covering Willie Smith on the line.

Pearson put in a fine diving header just wide from Holifield's cross but in the last five minutes Wanderers again came in for some heavy punishment as the home side pressed for three points. Things looked ominous when John Bailey put Kelly clean through the defence in the 85th minute. This is when Kelly is at his most dangerous and the memories of his great goal against Brighton in the F.A. Cup were flooding back as he raced towards the Wycombe goal. Spittle came out to narrow the angle and Wycombe players raced back to cover. It seemed Kelly must score but he checked and tried to cut inside where he came up against the retreating defence and the chance was gone.

With not a second of injury time, the final whistle brought an interesting game to a close with the result paying tribute to two strong defences that had dominated proceedings on this occasion.

LEATHERHEAD: J. Swannell, D. Sargent, C. Woffinden, D. Reid, P. Page, W. Smith, J. Cooper, J. Bailey, C. Kelly, J. Baker, J. Doyle, Sub. R. Eaton (not used).

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies, H. Kennedy,

G. Fraser, M. Holifield, I. Pearson, H. Kettleborough, D. Evans (sub A. Horseman 74 mins).

Referee: E. Carter.